

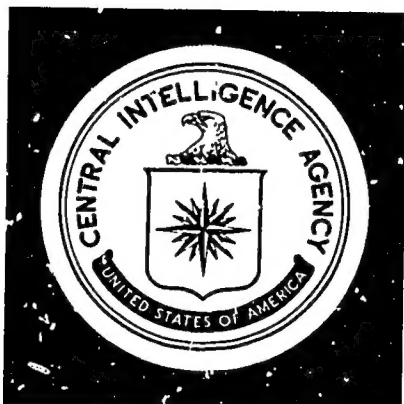
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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

WEEKLY SUMMARY

Special Report

Ghana: A Very Different Junta

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On 13 January 1972, for the second time in six years, the soldiers took power in Accra. This time, however, things are different. The new army leaders are a different breed and have a different view of their role than the older officers who threw Nkrumah out in 1966. They are much more nationalistic and inclined to be more authoritarian, but they are much less sure of how to proceed, even organizationally. They are groping for policies and programs and are listening to many diverse voices, some of which favor wrenching Ghana sharply away from the pro-Western orientation it has maintained since 1966. At this stage, the new leaders, while more mistrustful of all foreigners, seem well disposed toward the West, especially the US, and anxious to work out an accommodation on Ghana's major problem—its foreign debt. But they are, above all, committed to getting Ghana moving again. They know they must produce results quickly or rely more heavily on force to remain in power.

The Army Takes Over

Although the leaders of the coup apparently were motivated primarily by personal grievances, their action coincided with growing unrest over the Busia government's failure in its two-and-a-half years to solve Ghana's economic problems. The economy was still suffering from nine years of mismanagement by the Nkrumah regime, there had been a general decline in cocoa prices, and the country was saddled with an enormous external debt that had reached nearly \$1 billion. Unemployment had risen steadily since the ouster of Nkrumah, and inflation, which had been checked somewhat by the military government

that had preceded the Busia regime, was again becoming a serious problem. The fiscally orthodox Busia government had sought guidance from international financial institutions from which Ghana has been receiving important aid. Partly because of this advice the government in mid-1971 inaugurated austerity measures that significantly eroded the living standards of many Ghanaians. Busia's harsh and inept implementation of these measures, coupled with the acknowledged priority he gave to rural development, gradually alienated key urban elements, particularly organized labor and the civil service. Busia made his final mistake when he applied these measures to the military.

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At the center of the coup plot was Colonel I. K. ("Ike") Acheampong, a 40-year-old officer imbued with a profound belief that all politicians are corrupt.

The New Junta

The coup swept away the carefully prepared constitution by which Busia had governed following free elections in August 1969. Political power is now vested in a nine-man National Redemption Council that rules by decree. Its key people are Acheampong and two of the three majors whose support was critical to the success of the coup, R. M. Baah and A. H. Selormey.

Ghana's new military rulers clearly are a different breed from the senior army and police officials who made up Ghana's first military junta, which ruled from February 1966 until October 1969. The current leaders are younger. They are more junior, have rather different military backgrounds, and are appreciably more nationalistic.

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Acheampong's key collaborators were three majors who shared his displeasure over military promotions and assignments. Busia's discrimination against the large and energetic Ewe tribe gave two of the majors, who are members of that tribe, an added grievance. All three were second in command of important army units in the Accra area. In the early hours of 13 January, they seized control of these units and took over the government.

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More important, however, is the different perception the new leaders have of their mission, which they see in grander terms than did the first junta. The earlier group viewed itself essentially as a caretaker and saw its mission in terms of liberating the country from all vestiges of the Nkrumah government. In economic matters, the first junta sought mainly to halt the slide into chaos and to sort out Ghana's foreign financial obligations before turning the problems over to the civilians. The new leadership has made much of its intention to use its military experience to redeem Ghana from the mistakes of all previous governments, to attack vigorously the problems left essentially untouched by the first junta, and to get the economy moving again. The middle-grade officers who dominate the present junta seem much less qualified to deal with these problems, however, and none of them has the experience needed to handle his new responsibilities.

Yet, the new military leaders appear, at least at this time, to envision a longer tenure than that of the first junta. There was little doubt but that the first group fully intended to make good its commitment to return to civilian rule, and it did. The current leaders' faint promises in that regard seem hollow. They have a strong bias against politicians and seem to hold the first junta in contempt, not only for its failure to apply independent solutions to Ghana's economic problems but also for allowing power to pass to "cor-

rupt" politicians. If and when the current rulers get around to considering restoring civilian rule, they are likely to bend every effort to ensure that power does not devolve on any of the major politicians who have been active since independence.

Influences on the New Government

The junta has sought advice from a wide variety of sources and seems willing to listen to counsel from virtually any quarter. Judged in terms of policy decisions thus far, the most influential advisers have been the experienced economic specialists in the civil service who were named to an Economic Review Committee immediately after the coup. This group apparently drafted Acheampong's debt policy statement announced on 5 February, the major economic action so far. These advisers seem to be doing a fairly effective job of guiding the junta through Ghana's tangled financial thickets and in acquainting the soldiers with the realities of the country's economic problems.

The junta has been more reluctant to accept advice from the private sector. Several old-line economic specialists outside the government service, who were initially tabbed to serve on a high-level National Advisory Council, were forced to resign after only three days in office. The council included Robert Gardiner—the able and respected Ghanaian who heads the UN Economic

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Commission for Africa—and several of the most prominent and experienced business leaders in Ghana. During their brief tenure, the council's members were subjected to a barrage of harsh criticism in the government press, which leveled charges that they were "burnt-out old men" whose loyalties and ideologies were out of tune with the younger generation of "African revolutionaries." The junta's abrupt reversal on these appointments reflected a determination to seek fresh approaches to Ghana's problems.

The soldiers have received advice from other sources, which have urged a return to the pro-Communist positions espoused during the Nkrumah era. Several former members of Nkrumah's government and political party have submitted policy proposals that would drastically alter Ghana's domestic and foreign orientation.

The greatest impact so far of these people has been in terms of the rhetoric of the new government.

owned newspapers, which have increasingly reflected a neo-Nkrumahist stance. These papers have been calling for revolutionary change and

have sharply criticized Ghana's close ties with the West. The papers have also carried biting criticism of conservative elements in Ghana and have urged the new leaders to resurrect Nkrumah's political party as the only viable alternative to the banned Progress Party of Dr. Busia. At present, such a resurrection seems as unlikely as a political comeback by Nkrumah himself. Acheampong has repeatedly stated that his coup was not undertaken for the benefit of this or that political party, and exiled Nkrumahists have been warned that they must still answer any outstanding criminal charges if they return to Ghana. There are, however, indications the junta may allow Nkrumah, who apparently is near death in a cancer institute in Romania, to return to Ghana to live out his last days in his home village.

The new leadership has generally kept former opposition politicians at arms' length despite their persistent offers of help. In late March, however, the junta appointed two prominent civilian politicians, Komla Gbedemah and Joe Appiah, to serve as roving ambassadors. Gbedemah, a major figure in the Nkrumah regime until he was purged in 1961, was Busia's main opponent in the 1969 elections; Appiah at the time of the coup was chairman of the now banned opposition Justice Party. Acheampong may have decided it is safer to keep Gbedemah and Appiah busy working for the junta, frequently abroad, than to allow them to become the focus of discontent. Gbedemah was once a

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highly effective finance minister and could provide the junta needed expertise.

The Junta's Performance

The new junta has not gotten off to a very auspicious start. Its first three months in power have been marked by indecision and delay both in organizing an administration and in developing policies. There has been much backing and filling on appointments—beginning with the membership on the governing council itself—and decisions have been taken on an ad hoc basis. The military officers finally appointed to head the various government departments are all inexperienced and the abilities of most appear limited. Under these circumstances, coordination within the bureaucracy is minimal.

The new leaders' indecision and confusion reflects in part a failure to give much thought before the coup to what they would do once in power. A preoccupation with security has further hampered their ability to make policy decisions. Acheampong, an Ashanti tribesman, and some of his non-Ewe associates seem to have become inordinately fearful of plotting by Ewes who emerged from the post-coup scramble as the largest single ethnic bloc in the new junta. Subsequent maneuvering by some Ewes bent on advancing their own fortunes or that of tribal brothers has apparently led Acheampong to suspect the tribe is out to regain the decisive

influence it enjoyed under the first junta

The new regime's concern with security is reflected in its evident determination to ruin, politically as well as financially, all members of the ousted Busia government and possibly many of the former opposition politicians as well. After releasing all but the biggest fish in the old government, the junta ordered their re-arrest. Some 500 Ghanaians who held positions under Busia are now in prison. At the same time, a wide-ranging probe of the financial holdings of members of the old regime has been launched.

In economic policy matters, the junta has lifted some of Busia's harsh austerity measures, but has discovered that its options are more limited than appeared at first glance. The new leadership has restored fringe benefits for the military and civil servants, canceled some special taxes, revalued Ghana's currency, and instituted subsidized price controls on essential food items. Economic necessities have forced the junta to impose import controls and continue an essentially austere budget, which to some degree will offset the former measures.

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Although the junta has attempted to make life easier for urban dwellers, it has also chosen to continue the Busia regime's priority interest in rural development. The main thrust of this policy is the junta's highly touted "operation feed yourself," an attempt to encourage Ghanaians to increase agricultural production. It is likely to be some time before this operation produces real and tangible benefits. Ironically, the regime may soon benefit from Busia's emphasis on rural development as the country is expected soon to become self-sufficient in some currently imported commodities.

The junta's most popular economic move thus far has been its 5 February pronouncement repudiating some Nkrumah era debts to the UK and unilaterally altering the payment schedules of others. The details remain negotiable, however, and the move was basically a bid for longer term relief. The junta believes—and there is considerable supporting evidence—that many of the Nkrumah era debts were fraudulent in that sharp operators took advantage of Ghanaian officials to saddle the country with expensive loans for unviable projects. Many Ghanaians view the reschedulings and attendant interest surcharges as onerous and unfair, and they consider the conditions imposed by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund beyond the political endurance of any Ghanaian government.

In foreign affairs, the junta has already begun to move toward a nonaligned position. Acheampong has on several occasions remarked that past governments unreservedly accepted guidance from the West. He says he intends to right this. The new government has re-established relations with China—suspended several months after the ouster of Nkrumah—and is looking into the possibility of importing certain commodities from other Communist states in the event that current sources in the West dry up. The junta is also seeking to reactivate several industrial projects begun with Communist aid under Nkrumah. The Soviet Embassy and East German Trade Mission have been augmented and are certain to be more active in the future.

Acheampong has denounced the Busia government's sympathetic attitude toward dialogue with white-ruled southern Africa and indicated his regime will be more actively involved in supporting African liberation groups. The soldiers will also be more wary of those states in Africa, such as next-door Ivory Coast, which are considered too heavily influenced by the former colonial power. Acheampong and his fellow officers seem particularly to admire the nationalistic military government of Nigeria, black Africa's largest country, and may to some extent be influenced by Nigerian policies in both foreign and domestic affairs.

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In all fields, the junta's performance has carried a common theme—that of tackling problems in a brusque, military manner. The result is a heady impression of movement, including intensive press coverage of trimly attired soldiers out beating the bushes and getting things done. In the process, the soldiers have not been very sensitive to Ghana's legal traditions, which have been flouted, for example, by procedures adopted for the assets probe of Busia's people. While loudly denouncing the Busia regime's occasional forays against the civil rights of citizens, the junta itself has created a general tone of authoritarianism and regimentation unequaled since the days of Nkrumah. The junta has been extremely sensitive to criticism and has fostered an atmosphere that has clearly intimidated Ghana's wary journalists. Among new controls is a requirement that all Ghanaians who travel overseas must have exit permits. The junta's attempts to intimidate business and labor include a demand for a 20-year industrial truce. The soldiers' response to a minor strike was to double-time the strikers around the plant until they agreed to go back to work. Virtually all orders and decrees are accompanied by threats of severe reprisals if they are not followed to the letter. Typical is the junta's current response to developing food shortages. Last week, Acheampong declared queuing unpatriotic, threatened to inflict harsh punishment on those who persist in lining up for goods, and warned that shops attracting queues will be put out of business.

What Now?

The situation is fluid and the future murky. At present, Acheampong's junta is in control of the country, and no organized opposition is in sight. The initial apathy with which the junta was met has gradually given way to cautious approval and pride at least in the new leaders' nationalistic posture. This could quickly sour if the junta is unable to make some early progress in raising living standards. Thus, the junta has only limited time to settle down and develop an effective administration that can come up with solutions, as new and more severe economic pressures are already building. The failure to arrange for sufficient imports of foodstuffs and raw materials may soon lead to shortages that will heighten general public discontent. In addition, Ghana could lose some important foreign aid if the junta is unable soon to resolve the impasse on the debt problem.

The junta will also have to resist its inclination to regiment the Ghanaian people if it is to maintain the approval it currently enjoys. Even if a majority of Ghanaians turn against the government, there is little they can do other than provide a pretext and base of support for future coup plotters in the army, the only credible threat to the junta. The breakdown in military discipline that has occurred as a result of two successful coups in six years will have to be dealt with gingerly. Acheampong cannot but be aware

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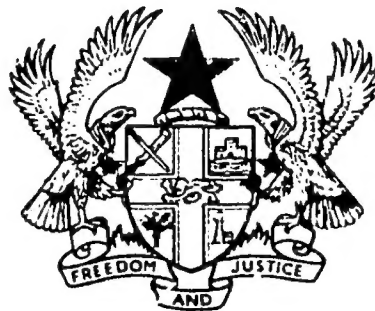
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that indiscipline led directly to the abortive lieutenants' coup a year after the ouster of Nkrumah and that the threat of a similar action remains. There seems to be a growing realization in the officer corps that further coups could destroy the army as it exists and plunge Ghana toward chaos. Given the frustrations that the inexperienced military leaders are likely to face in the coming months, they can only hope this realization gains the upper hand.

Because they are more nationalistic, Ghana's new military rulers will be more difficult to deal with; the West may suffer from close identifi-

cation with the first junta and the deposed Busia regime. The soldiers have already begun to blame recent food shortages on alleged reprisals by Western suppliers for the junta's economic policies. Much depends on the debt problem. Should the new leadership be unable to attain its essential goals because of what it sees as Western intransigence on the debt issue, it may feel compelled to listen more attentively to radicals such as Badu and be more inclined to look to Communist countries for guidance. But, even if the West is forthcoming, it seems likely that Ghana will at least again broaden its ties with the Communists.

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